Part II
Imagination and the Social

6 Interactional Glitches, Cooperation, and the Paradox of Public Joint Activities

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Introduction

Interactional problems of various kinds have long been the object of detailed description and reflection in the social sciences, especially in Erving Goffman's (1955) pioneering work on the ritualization of everyday encounters and the remedies employed for what he called 'face work'. He was followed by Harold Garfinkel's (1963) 'breaching experiments' and his discussion of 'trust', J.L. Austin's (1962) interest in 'unhappy' performative utterances, and conversation analysts' empirical investigations of self- and other-correction in spontaneous casual conversation (Schegloff et al. 1977). These investigations of various kinds of interactional trouble have revealed previously poorly understood aspects of human sociality, including the routine quality of maintaining the social order (Garfinkel 1963: 187);[1] the tight sequential organization of 'repair' within conversational turn-taking (Schegloff 1992); and the positive or negative effect that the choice of one word can make in routine questions by doctors (Heritage et al. 2007).

Building on these studies, I examine in some detail two cases of joint activities where unexpected performance errors occurred, causing, to use Austin's (1962: 16) term, a 'misfire' – a situation where 'the procedure that we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched'. This happens despite the participants' apparent spirit of cooperation or 'joint commitment' (Gilbert 2013) and previous experience with the tasks at hand (e.g., speaking in front of a large audience, making a toast, making an announcement). I call these events 'interactional glitches' to underscore that they are produced in the midst of an unfolding interaction and that they typically involve artefacts whose semiotic contents play a role in the malfunctioning of the activity.

The data analysed in this chapter expose some of the challenges that people have in doing things together, partly due to the typically limited amount of information available to participants in any situation to make their decisions, fulfil their roles, and, thus, constitute their joint activity. Interactional glitches show that things can fall apart even when the event appears to be a good candidate for what Tuomela (2000) calls 'full-blown cooperation'.

To explain such failures in public joint activities, I propose two hypotheses. The first draws from Edmund Husserl's phenomenology to claim that, under the pressure of public performance, certain (contextually activated and contextually possible) properties of a particular 'object' (see below) acquire a strong *attentional pull* (Throop & Duranti 2015), that is, an interactionally achieved prominence that overwhelms participants to the point of obscuring alternative interpretations of the culturally mediated sensory input. The second hypothesis builds on Richard Bauman's (1975) notion of verbal art as performance. The interactional glitches to be analysed below suggest that, in the public context of televized joint activities, the expectation for speakers to pull off a flawless performance generates two critical conditions: it foregrounds interactional problems rather than downplaying them and inhibits the type of creative improvisation that could produce a swift and successful repair.

These features of the interactions to be examined below suggest an intriguing hypothesis: the more constrained the joint activity is by so-called ritual concerns (Goffman 1981: 17), the more difficult it is for participants to adjust to an unexpected turn of events. As a consequence, when glitches occur in a constrained and tightly scripted activity, they are that much more likely to be glaringly obvious. And if it is true that, when things start to go wrong, a tight organization of joint action *gets in the way* of its repair, any model of joint activity needs to be flexible enough to allow for improvisation to handle the unpredictable force of real-life events.

Subject and Object as Co-participants in the Intentional Act

The present analysis of joint activities involving human participants and artefacts adopts methods introduced by conversation analysts and other students of human face-to-face interaction[2] and builds on a conceptualization of human action inspired by Husserl's writings. From the latter, I take the idea that intentional acts have two sources of meaning. The first comes from the notion of human intentionality as the aboutness or directness of our consciousness.[3] We can then think of this intending as going from the Subject towards the Object 'in the sense of specially noticing, or attending to something' (Husserl 1970: 562). I interpret this as meaning that an intention in a Husserlian perspective is a disposition to attend to, recognize, or make something into the object of our interest (Duranti 2015).

The second source of meaning is the Object as a *phenomenon*, that is, as something that makes manifest certain properties thereby affording certain subjective stances or states. I have tried to capture this schematically in Figure 6.1, where the top arrow (from left to right) indicates that the Subject or Ego, by attending to the Object, *intends* it in the phenomenological sense of constituting it as a particular type of entity. This act may or may not be
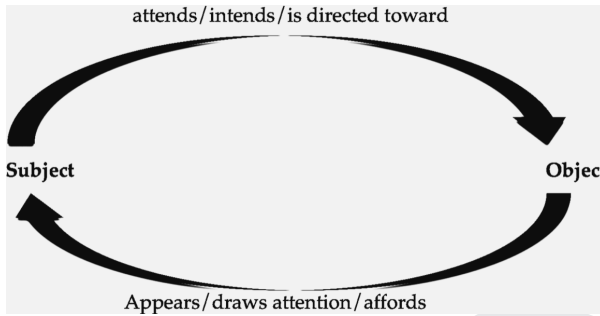
Figure 6.1 Subject and object as agentive resources in intentional acts.

realized or helped by language, given that an eyebrow flash (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1972) may be enough to alert us that something has been made the object of an act of recognition, surprise, or puzzlement. The bottom arrow (from right to left) indicates that the entity here called 'Object' participates in its own constitution as well as in the constitution of the Subject, e.g., by being available to the Subject in ways that may be said to 'draw attention' or afford certain intentional acts. A loud noise is more likely to be heard by a hearing Subject than a soft or muffled noise, a suffering face is more likely to elicit empathy from those who are in a position to directly perceive it than from those who are later told about it.

In endorsing a view of the traditional categories of Subject and Object as co-participants, I am leaving open the question of whether they can or should be treated as equal partners. For the purposes of the argument presented in this chapter, I am thus leaving open the ontological implications of how far we should go in projecting intentionality on various kinds of tools (Dennett 1987) or of non-human organisms like animals and plants (Kohn 2013). What interests me here is to define the relationship between Subject and Object as fluid and not predetermined. This means that what John Searle (1983) called the 'direction of fit' of intentional acts cannot be easily categorized on the basis of his typology of acts according to which seeing has a mind-to-world direction of fit and desiring has a world-to-mind direction of fit (1983: 53).

The notion of 'direction of fit' cannot accommodate the sudden prominence of certain properties of an Object, e.g., the pauses before or after a request, or the changing wilful disposition of a Subject, e.g., a person's determination to see an Object as something that the Object is not (for everyone else). How this directionality may move, shift, and be reshaped will be demonstrated below in the discussion of two cases in which 'seeing' and 'hearing' turn out to be problematic in the midst of highly structured public events.

Imagination

When we identify someone from the way they walk down the hall or we recognize a tune from a few notes coming out of the speakers in a store, we are engaging our imagination to fill the missing information and make a leap from the part to the whole:

> When we see a table, we view it from some particular side, and this side is thereby what is genuinely seen. Yet the table has still other sides. It has a non-visible back side, it has a non-visible interior; and these are actually indexes for a variety of sides, a variety of complexes of possible visibility.
> (Husserl 2001: 40)

Once recognized, such a routine part of our everyday experience, which is at the core of Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity,[4] reveals our creativity and at the same time, as recognized by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, makes evident the risks associated with having to fill a gap in the information that we receive from the sensorial input:

> Between the true object and the undisputed data of the senses, between within and without, there is a gulf which the subject must bridge at his own risk. In order to reflect the thing as it is, the subject must return to it more than he receives from it. The subject creates the world outside himself from the traces which it leaves in his senses: the unity of the thing in its manifold characteristics and states.
> (Horkheimer & Adorno 1996: 188–9)

Improvisation

By emphasizing the importance of temporality in human affairs (e.g., in gift exchanges), Pierre Bourdieu (1977) is perhaps the most well-known scholar in the social sciences to acknowledge the tension between predictability and unpredictability in social life. Moreover, in recognizing creativity and invention by means of the notion of *habitus*, he also made sure to keep in place the constraints posed 'by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production' (Bourdieu 1977: 95). This approach led to reducing creativity to 'regulated improvisation' (Bourdieu 1977: 11, 54), a position that can find support in many studies of improvisation in music where improvising is shown to be built on 'a rigorous and tightly knit system of structural principles' (Nettl & Riddle 1998: 391) and melodic patterns or 'licks' (Sawyer 2001: 157). Similarly, the fluid improvisation of everyday conversation, lecturing, and unscripted public speaking has been said to rely on a vast number of idioms (Pawley & Syder 1983; Duranti & McCoy 2021).

Yet if improvised behaviour is so tightly regulated and efficiently supported by routinized behaviours, how do glitches happen? Under what conditions do well-meaning, cooperative, and competent social agents end up doing the contextually 'wrong' thing? I answer this question through an analysis of two high-pressure public performances. During such heightened contexts, properties of particular 'objects' acquire a strong *attentional pull* (Throop & Duranti 2015). These objects thus achieve an interactional prominence that overwhelms participants to the point of obscuring alternative interpretations of the (always culturally mediated) perceptions of the sensory input. The 'gap' is thus filled in a contextually erroneous and often embarrassing way. To explain how this might happen, I propose to use Wittgenstein's notion of 'aspect'.

Wittgenstein's 'Aspect'

In the 1940s, Wittgenstein became interested in the works of psychologists. From Joseph Jastrow's *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, a study of the occult and deception, Wittgenstein borrowed a few (unacknowledged) insights and the (acknowledged) duck/rabbit picture here reproduced in Figure 6.2 as found in Jastrow's book.[5]

Before introducing the duck/rabbit picture, Wittgenstein drew attention to two uses of the word 'see' (*sehen* in the original German text). One use (or meaning) was exemplified by the question 'What do you see there?' and
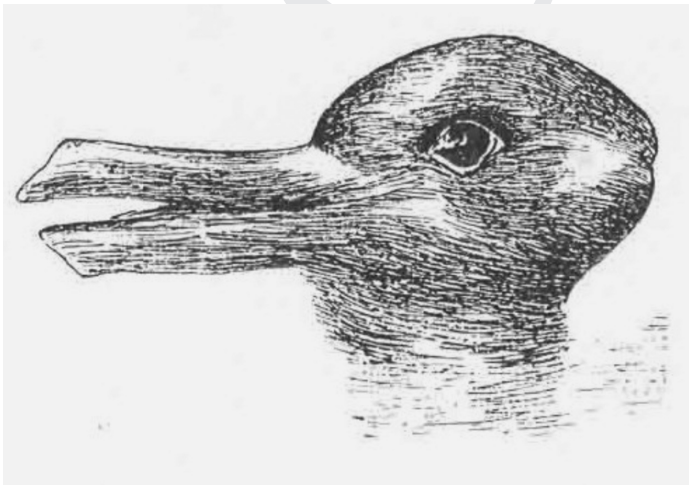

Figure 6.2 The duck/rabbit image from Jastrow (1901: 294), originally published in 1892 in the magazine *Fliegende Blätter*, that Wittgenstein reproduced in simplified form to introduce the concept of 'aspect seeing' (Wittgenstein 1958: 193–4).

the answer 'I see *this*.' And the other use was given in the sentence 'I see a likeness between these two faces.'

As soon becomes clear in the text, where he also writes about hearing music (1958: 202), Wittgenstein was not exclusively interested in the word seeing *per se*. What he wanted to show was that in seeing something – just as in hearing something – we are simultaneously interpreting it (Wittgenstein 1958: 193). He also pointed out that when we 'suddenly' (German *plötzlich*) realize that what we had always seen *as* X can also be seen *as* Y, we not only change our interpretation of the same picture, we also experience what he called a 'change of aspect' (1958: 196). With 'aspect' standing for 'meaning', Wittgenstein had arrived at an effective metaphor for talking about how our understanding of something in the world through our senses is subject to multiple interpretations, even though we may not realize it.[6] Below, I will use these insights to show that hearing or seeing the contextually wrong 'aspect' is a key ingredient of interactional glitches.

Two Collective Activities

The two cases to be analysed in this chapter are distinct types of activities: one is a toast at a state banquet and the other is an announcement at an awards ceremony. They also have something in common: they are both public events involving many participants. Two of the participants play a major role and are the focus of aural and visual attention. In the first case, of the two main participants, one is (gesturally and verbally) making the toast (the then-President of the USA, Barack Obama) and the other is receiving and responding to it (the Queen of England, Elizabeth II). In the second case, the two participants (well-known actors) co-perform the announcement of the recipient of the award. In both cases, the joint activity occurs in front of a large audience and crucially, in both cases, the activity requires collaboration and coordination with other participants who are not visually foregrounded. But despite the large number of people participating in the two events, they conform to what Michael Bratman (2009) called 'modest sociality', a quality of activities cooperatively performed by a (typically small) group of individuals as opposed to (typically large) institutions like corporations or governments. As such, they would be governed by what analytic philosophers have identified as 'collective', 'shared', or 'we-intentionality' (e.g., Tuomela & Miller 1988; Searle 1990; Bratman 1992, 2014). As I will show below, the parties constituting the 'we' are subject to change as the event unfolds and more people may be held accountable for the misfire.

President Obama's Toast to Queen Elizabeth

The first case took place during a banquet at Buckingham Palace in honour of President and Mrs Obama's 2011 visit to the UK.[7] The guests at the banquet and millions of television viewers following the event – as well as those who

watched it later on the news or social media – witnessed President Obama unsuccessfully completing his toast. This glitch was reported by the press in both the UK and the USA, with a variety of explanations and culprits. *The Telegraph* (25 May 2011) recognized the US President's painful experience in the first part of the headline ('Barack Obama suffers royal toast mishap at Queen's banquet') and then blamed him for breaking 'royal protocol by speaking over the national anthem'. Transcript 1 is a transcription of the words and actions of the part of the toast that became the object of discussion and criticism in the media.[8]

> **Transcript 1** (Buckingham Palace; President Obama is standing while the Queen and Prince Philip, on his left, and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, on his right, are sitting)
>
> President: Ladies and Gentlemen, please stand with me, and raise your glasses
>
> [
>
> *(puts down the piece of paper he was holding in left hand)*
>
> as I propose a <u>toa</u>st *(5 secs pause, during which time the President picks up his glass with his right hand and everyone who is seated stands up)*
>
> to Her <u>Ma</u>jesty, the <u>Queen</u>. (1 sec. pause)
>
> To the vi<u>ta</u>lity of the special relationship, …
>
> [
>
> *(the Royal Band starts to play 'God Save the Queen')*
>
> Between our people and in the words of Shakespeare
>
> to this blessed plot, this Earth this realm… this England.
>
> To the <u>Queen</u>.
>
> The President turns toward the Queen with his glass raised while no one else raises their glass. Keeping her hands clasped in front of her, the Queen smiles and turns her head towards the President for a fraction of a second, barely moving her torso, and, speaking softly, says something like 'You are very kind.'
>
> Once the Queen is once again staring straight ahead, the President also turns to his left to face the rest of the guests, lowers his glass, looks up to his right and then, tight-lipped, resumes his standing position facing the guests. All of this happens while the Royal Band is still playing 'God Save The Queen'.

As many of the media commentators later realized, when the Royal Band started to play 'God Save The Queen', President Obama had not finished his toast. Once the music started, the simultaneous occurrence of the verbal and the musical performance resulted in the second half of the toast

acquiring an unanticipated musical 'soundtrack' (as President Obama later joked). Also, and most crucially, the toast as a whole did not achieve the expected response, what Austin (1962: 120, 138) terms the 'uptake', from the recipient, the Queen, and, subsequently, by the rest of the guests at the banquet. As described in Transcript 1, once President Obama completed his toast and, while the band was still playing, he turned (left) towards the Queen with his raised glass and repeated his earlier 'To the Queen'. At this point, the Queen smiled and briefly turned her head toward the President whispering something that sounds like 'You are very kind', while keeping her hands clasped in front of her.

Although those actions might be said to constitute a visible (even though barely audible) acknowledgement of President Obama's toast, they were not taken to be an official response. We know this from the 'native' reactions as reported in the British popular press (see Throop & Duranti 2015), where the Queen is described as not responding at first to the President's toast. For example, in the same *Telegraph* article mentioned above, the President is said to have 'seemed baffled when [the Queen] did not respond'. We also witness the failure of the first attempt to conclude the toast because when the President says 'To the Queen' for the second time, thereby ending his speech, the rest of the members of the royal family and the guests do not move to raise their glasses. They do so only later, following the actions of the Queen, who waits for the next to last note of the anthem to look down at her glass on the table (Prince Philip and the Duchess of Cornwall also look down) and then, on the last note of the anthem, unclasps her hands and reaches towards her glass. Only then does she raise her glass while turning towards President Obama.

Demonstrating the refined embodied knowledge that we would expect of an experienced monarch, the Queen's eyes meet the President's right after the music has stopped. President Obama, in turn, picks up his glass, which he had put down after not getting a reaction from the Queen, and turns towards the Queen in time, even though he had started reaching for his glass a fraction of a second later, finally adding a quick nod. Further evidence that this was the expected ending of the President's toast is provided by the President himself who repeats (for the third time) 'To the Queen', even though by that point the Queen had turned away to face the rest of the guests again.

The Royal Band's Aspect Hearing

The most likely source of the mismatch between President Obama's and the Queen's actions is the badly timed start of the anthem. As discussed elsewhere (Throop & Duranti 2015), this was most likely due to the phrasing and timing of the first few lines of President Obama's toast, which contained the line 'to Her Majesty, the Queen' preceded by a five-second pause, while everyone was getting up, and followed by a one-second pause.

Using Wittgenstein's concept of aspect, we can say that the band (or more likely its conductor) heard President Obama's line 'to the Queen' as the ending of his toast. If this analysis is correct, it would be an example of 'aspect hearing' (Park 1998: 166–7). The phrase, 'To the Queen', is heard as the last portion of the speech. As shown in Transcript 1, by the time the band started to play, a fraction of a second later, the President had already embarked in the rest of his prepared speech ('The vitality of the special relationship …'), which he continued to deliver all the way to its apparently planned end. The rest, briefly described above, seemed to follow from there or, rather, to be interpreted in light of the band's mishearing.

Hospitality Versus *Protocol*

The glitch and the delayed conclusion of the toast make evident a number of things.

First, contrary to what is typically expected in large public events of this sort, the two main participants suddenly found themselves unable to rely upon a shared plan or an agreed-upon protocol. They were in uncharted territory, forced to find a jointly achieved ending that would satisfy the requirements of both protocol and hospitality. They had to improvise in the midst of a highly formal and planned event while the world was watching. In this context, the Queen's slight turn towards the President accompanied by a rather discreet smile and a whispered compliment was an unscripted and creative effort to attend to the 'trouble' constituted by a toast that had gone wrong.

In Goffman's (1955) terms, we could say that the Queen was trying simultaneously to save the President's 'face' (by producing some kind of positive response) without breaking the protocol of clearly speaking over the anthem. The Queen's controlled gesture and *sotto voce*, almost intimate, appreciation constituted an acknowledgement of the toast made in her honour. However, judging from the reactions of the guests, who did not move or talk, and the subsequent accounts in the press, her actions were not interpreted as constituting her overt and official 'uptake' and, therefore, they could not lift the President out of embarrassment. In a way, they constitute something of a *phantom*, that is, a phenomenon that both is and is not. It quickly appears and then disappears. Were it not for the television cameras, we probably would not even have been able to talk about it.

The 2017 American Academy Awards

The next case to be analysed is another public event also involving at first two main participants and then a number of other individuals. The specific data available for analysis consist of the video recording (available on the Internet) of the 2017 Academy Awards ceremony (the 'Oscars'), which was performed in front of an audience of more than 3,000 people in the Dolby

Theatre, in Los Angeles, and televized live to millions of viewers throughout the world. In this ceremony each award is, by custom, presented by past award winners or nominees. After being introduced to the audience, the celebrity announcers walk to the microphone at the front of the stage, say something previously prepared about the category to be recognized, and then proceed to open and read from a sealed envelope that they have been given shortly before walking on stage. For the purposes of the present analysis, some features of the event deserve particular attention.

One of these features is the tension between, on the one hand, the scripted quality of the sequences of acts that lead to the publicly visible opening of the sealed envelope and the reading of the name(s) of the winner(s) and, on the other hand, the expectation that something will not go exactly as planned, that is, that a presenter might, albeit briefly, go 'off script' to inject a personal touch within the otherwise conventional and highly predictable sequence of acts. Another feature is the way in which each announcement is designed to sustain a crescendo that creates suspense leading up to the moment when the identity of the winner(s) is revealed. Time and timing are both important for the successful execution of the speech acts that de facto constitute the bestowing of the title of 'best X' of the year. As a multimillion-dollar production representing the entire movie industry, the activity is expected to be perfectly orchestrated and without glitches.

Time-wise the schedule of the overall ceremony is known to be very tight, given the number of categories being recognized, the unpredictability of how long the winners' speeches will be, and the need to gain and maintain the interest of viewers, many of whom are watching the show in a different time zone. This means that the announcers of the awards need to stick to the script, but without showing that they are in a rush, in order to avoid upsetting the people who are being honoured by the nominations. The announcers' participation is, in turn, a reaffirmation of their important status in the movie industry and a bonus to their fans and the people whose jobs are dependent on the announcers' continuous media presence. Their delivery must show their craftsmanship as performers and remind everyone of their charisma and stage presence. While sticking to the script, they are also expected to give viewers a little taste of their own unique screen persona – the self that can be recognized by fans and colleagues – without taking too much attention away from the people who are being honoured with the nominations and the awards. Histrionic behaviour may please their fans but annoy their peers.

Given the high stakes at play in the event, tight planning and coordination among the on-stage and off-stage participants are required in order to avoid the faux pas always possible in the fragile world of human encounters, where, as masterfully described by Goffman (1959, 1967), the sacred self of the participants must be recognized and protected to avoid embarrassment. At the same time, going off script is something that the audience expect from

the larger-than-life personas (in the ritual sense of the term) of the celebrities on the stage. This means that it is difficult for members of the audience to know whether something that looks unplanned or 'off script' is a sign of a problem or just a presenter's way of playing with their role. Below, I show how this played out in the course of the announcement of the title of the 2017 'Best Picture' award, when the wrong card ended up being seen and read as the right card.

Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway Announce the 'Best Picture' of the Year

As we watch the video, we see the host, Jimmy Kimmel, reminding the audience that it was 'the fiftieth anniversary of the great movie *Bonnie and Clyde*', as the camera reveals the two stars of that film, Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty, standing backstage next to the long stairs on the stage. As the translucent curtain lifts, Dunaway and Beatty walk from back to front stage smiling. Beatty holds the red winner's envelope. The audience applauds enthusiastically and the orchestra plays loudly. Once Dunaway and Beatty arrive at the front stage, the two thank the audience repeatedly. When the applause ends, each of them speaks to the importance of moviemaking, including a comment by Beatty about how movies 'show the increased diversity in our community … and … our respect and freedom all over the world'. Dunaway then announces: 'Here are the nominees for Best Picture.' A large screen comes down behind the announcers on the stage and brief segments from each of the eight nominated movies are shown. Dunaway reminds the audience of the title of each nominated movie. Once clips from all eight pictures have been shown, the screen goes up, and the camera comes back to a medium shot of Dunaway and Beatty. Beatty starts to look at the card as he pulls it out of the envelope, and then sheepishly looks up at the audience for a fraction of a second before returning to the card, this time for two full seconds. While holding the card in the right hand, Beatty uses his left hand to check the inside of the empty envelope one more time as if something was missing. Then, while holding the card in his right hand, he lifts again the back flap of the envelope and uses the fingers of his left hand to pull the back flap as if checking the inside of the envelope one more time. His lifted eyebrows quickly drop and, as he turns towards Dunaway, his expression shifts into intense scrutiny that could be interpreted as puzzlement. The smile quickly fades, however, as he turns again to look down at the envelope, raises his eyebrows, and finally starts to utter the formulaic phrase whereby the award is typically announced and proclaims, 'The Academy Award for Best Picture…' The tension of the moment is further heightened by the fact that instead of completing the phrase or giving the card to Dunaway, Beatty turns silent for six long seconds during which times he gives a quick cryptic look into the camera and then returns to look down while his right-hand fingers search inside the envelope. During this time, there is sparse laughter

in the audience which indicates that at least some people are interpreting his actions as funny. Dunaway's smile seems to go along with that interpretation until she issues a soft but hearable 'You are impossible!' underscored by a vertical movement of both hands as if wanting to put a 'stop' to his apparent stalling. Beatty, who turns to face her, shows that he is not quite done with whatever he is up to. He turns away again to look down at the card one more time and only then, making a half smile, and without completing his part of the formula with '… goes to…' hands the card to Dunaway who had just urged, 'go on!' She quickly glances at the card before grabbing it with both hands and saying loud and clear into the microphone: '*La La Land*!'

The expected screams and voiced excitement can be heard from the audience, followed by applause and music while Dunaway and Beatty are shown to be smiling with some sense of satisfaction. The television cameras immediately cut to the 'winners' in the audience who are standing and hugging while an off-screen announcer says: '*La La Land* has fourteen Oscar nominations this year and it is tie for the most nominated movies in Oscar history. Winning seven Oscars…'

The producers, directors, and main actors of *La La Land* walk to the stage and the anticipated ritual of speeches of gratitude by the three producers begins. Jordan Horowitz gives the first speech, followed by Marc Platt, and then Fred Berger, who suddenly stops speaking to turn towards the people behind him. Berger then turns again towards the audience and, with a different tone, marking what Goffman (1981) terms a change of 'footing', says: 'We lost by the way.' As Berger continues with 'but you know', Horowitz approaches the microphone to tell everyone: 'Guys, guys, I'm sorry no, there's – there's a mistake. *Moonlight*, you guys won best picture.' As applause starts to build and screams are heard from the audience, Horowitz continues to assure his *Moonlight* colleagues who are down in the audience that 'This is not a joke' and calls them to come on stage: 'Come up!' The message is repeated and to definitely prove it Horowitz snatches from Beatty's hands a card, which will turn out to be different from the one Beatty had been previously given. While Horowitz holds it up, the television camera zooms in on the card to show the boldfaced title *Moonlight* with the names of the three producers underneath. 'Best Picture' is at the very bottom of the card, barely visible in much smaller italicized letters. After an apology mixed with light humour by the host Jimmy Kimmel, followed by Horowitz's reassurance that he will be 'very proud to hand this to my friends from *Moonlight*', which is rewarded with 'That's nice of you, that's very nice' from Kimmel, Beatty can be heard asking Kimmel: 'May I say something?' (Figure 6.3).

A Participant's First Account

Beatty comes back to the mike while the audience is still applauding and behind him Horowitz and actor Mahershala Ali from *Moonlight* can be seen

Figure 6.3 'Best Picture' card at the 2017 Academy Awards (Bannister 2017).

hugging each other. Beatty says 'hello' twice to get the audience's attention and then goes into his account of what happened.

Transcript 2   (WB = Warren Beatty, JK = Jimmy Kimmel)

WB: I- hh (*smiling*) want- (1 sec pause)

JK: (*pretending to be screaming at him*) Warren, what did you do?!

WB: (*fakes the beginning of a 'fall' while smiling*)

AUD: (*some people are heard laughing*)

WB: I want to tell you what happened.

JK: Oh.

WB: I opened the envelope, and it said, 'Emma Stone, *La La Land*' that's why, (*starts gesturing with his left hand holding the envelope and the card toward the place where Faye Dunaway was standing during the announcement*)
I took such a long look at Faye. And at you. I wasn't trying to be funny
(*laughs and then widens his hands making a 'harmless' gesture*)

JK: (*walking toward microphone*) Well, you <u>were</u> funny.

In this account, Beatty confesses that the reason for his hesitation was not an attempt to be funny but the realization that he was given an incorrect card, namely, the one for Best Actress. But, as we know, once Beatty showed the card to Dunaway, she had no hesitation in reading it loud and clear: '*La La Land*'! How could this televized catastrophe happen?

Figure 6.4 'Best Actress' card handed by mistake to Warren Beatty (Bannister 2017).

Seeing the Wrong Card as the Right Card

Using Wittgenstein's notion of aspect, we can say that Dunaway saw the card *as* the Best Picture card even though it was the Best Actress card. As we can see in Figure 6.4, the title *La La Land* was printed in large letters and in boldface whereas Best Actress was printed much smaller and in italics at the very bottom of the card. These material aspects of the object of the (intended) 'reading the Best Picture' act combined with the contextual pressure that Dunaway felt, as she had demonstrated when she told Beatty he was 'impossible', can be said to have established a situation in which the different pieces of information on the card did not have equal force and a more accurate reading was no longer easy to achieve.

Once she finally received the card from Beatty, Dunaway seemed eager to end the suspense and quickly give relief to those in the audience who had been anxiously awaiting the announcement. Under these circumstances, we can hypothesize that *any movie title* to be found on the card would have exerted a strong affect-laden 'attentional pull' (Throop & Duranti 2015) to be immediately read, but in this case the attentional pull of the printed *La La Land* title was even stronger given the number of awards that the movie had already received throughout the evening. Dunaway's misreading can thus be made sense by taking into consideration the contextual expectations as well as the specific semiotic properties of the material artefact (the printed card) that was mediating the interaction. What still remains to be explained is Beatty's behaviour.

Covering up a Perceived Mistake

If Beatty knew, as he claimed later (as in Transcript 2), that the card was the wrong card, why didn't he say so? One answer to this question is provided by Beatty himself a few weeks later, on April 15, during The Graham Norton Show, where he appeared together with a number of other actors.

Transcript 3   (Interview with Warren Beatty on The Graham Norton Show, April 15, 2017; GN = Graham Norton, WB = Warren Beatty)

GN: W<u>hat</u> was going on in your head?

WB: ha::. … I- I ea:: I thought- 'Well, maybe this is a mis<u>print</u>.' You know,

GN: yeah

W: And then, and then I shouldn't foul up the show just because someone made a little error.

GN: It did look like you were just – you hand it to Faye, as in kind of like – 'Well, I'll let her do it.'

WB: No-no-no.

AUD: (*laughs*)

WB: No. (*shakes his head with slight smile, raises open hands up*) No. My instructions were '<u>Ta</u>ke the envelope' when I walked out, I couldn't have it before that. Then I go out, then – I say something.

GN: Yeah.

WB: And then I open the envelope and then I give it – to Faye, and she then says, what it says.

GN: And she <u>did</u>.

WB: Well it looked like uh- it- it- it said- the name of the movie.

GN: Oh- did it?

WB: *La La Land*. Yep.

In this account, Beatty is claiming that even though he knew that the card was the wrong card, he felt justified not to publicly reveal the error because he did not want to 'foul up the show'. This statement suggests that we must widen of the scope of what counts as the 'collective we' in the course of the unfolding interaction.

Hiding a mistake in order not to 'foul up the show' is a good example of cooperation. Beatty was cooperating by trying to imagine what the card should have looked like. In the collective intentionality model of cooperation mentioned above, Beatty and Dunaway would share the 'collective' (or 'we-') intention 'we will do the announcement', which entails each of them doing one part or portion of the activity without which the shared goal of the whole activity cannot be achieved.[9] The recording shows that each of them did indeed play their part, with Beatty opening the envelope and eventually handing it to Dunaway for her to read it. But Transcript 3 also indicates that, in the course of the on-stage interaction, the participants constituting the 'collective we' had changed. Beatty had widened the 'we' beyond himself

and Dunaway, apparently because of his moral commitment to saving the 'face' of several other individuals who were not on the stage and whose identity might not have been known to him.

Listening to Beatty's narrative account of what he was thinking at the time, we can infer that he was conceptualizing the 'we' of the announcement as involving the person who had made 'a little error', but we do not know who that person was. In this light, the joint activity of 'doing the announcement' is no longer only Beatty's and Dunaway's. It becomes, or at least is represented in his narrative as, the failed collective achievement of a trio or perhaps of a larger and unspecified number of people. Someone could claim that all of this is implied by the fact that Beatty is performing a task on behalf of an institution, the American Academy of Motion Pictures, which includes a large number of participants involved in planning, preparing, and enabling what happens on stage in front of the cameras. But this hypothesis is not supported by the actions of some of the participants. For example, when the host Jimmy Kimmel gets back to the microphone, perhaps to end Beatty's explanation and the entire show, he shouts: 'Warren, what did you do?' and not 'What did *we* do?' The collective 'we' is gone. Even though we can interpret this as an attempt at injecting humour by a hyperbolic and thus ironic blaming at the expense of Beatty, it is a bit too close to what appears to have happened to be really funny (the reaction was sparse laughter) and it minimally leaves open the possibility that, if not Beatty, there is *someone* who is responsible for the mistake.

Similarly, as shown in Transcript 3, Graham Norton suggested that by handing over the card to Dunaway, Beatty had avoided taking responsibility. Beatty denied wanting to do that, but the conversation shows that the interaction on the stage and its post hoc interpretations display a continuous tension, a back-and-forth between focusing on collective and individual actions, with their implicit responsibility claims. The ambivalent quality of the activity as individual versus collective is fed by the participants' vulnerability vis-à-vis the multiple properties of the card as a phenomenon. Throughout the event, the Object 'card' metamorphoses. In one version of the story, the card 'shows itself'[10] as the wrong card to Beatty and as the right card to Dunaway. Beatty's hesitations are later interpreted as indexes of his doubts about the appropriateness of the card, but in the midst of the interaction, his facial expressions, interruptions, pauses, and smiles were interpreted by Dunaway as indicating something else, which she verbalizes with a softly spoken but audible: 'You are impossible!'

Due to the difficulty of its interpretation, the card as a *phenomenon* shares some features with the Queen's fleeting acknowledgement of President Obama's toast. Like the Queen's gesture, the card is something that is and is not what it is supposed to be. The shifting ground of the right versus the wrong card unsettles the presupposed cooperation of the joint activity. In the interactional glitch, the activity as a collective achievement breaks down. We can assume that had things gone smoothly, no individual (Beatty, Dunaway,

the envelope carrier, etc.) would have been blamed, and Beatty and Dunaway would have been remembered as those who *jointly* announced the 2017 Best Picture, instead of those who *failed* to announce the 2017 Best Picture. Adopting the 'collective intentionality' model, we could say that Beatty and Dunaway shared the we-intention 'we are announcing the Best Movie' or the shared goal to 'announce the best movie', but the intention was not sufficient for the goal to be achieved.

There is, however, an alternative interpretation, which comes with a different conceptualization of joint activities. In this alternative view, what happened was a misfire but not an aberration. Rather, it was one of the possible outcomes of a joint activity that requires a high level of coordination to be accomplished within strict guidelines. In this version, participants do not all have the same collective intention or goal once and for all. Nor do they fall back on individual intentions, individual acts, and individual responsibility when things go wrong. Instead they shift in and out of *intersubjective attunement*, feeling stronger or weaker pressure to coordinate, adapt, or adjust to what others are simultaneously or sequentially doing. More than exceptions to the norm of smooth functioning of a collective 'we', interactional glitches would, then, be *phenomenal* in the sense that they can show us that participants in a joint activity are prone and expected to adjust their actions to the unfolding interaction that can only be partly anticipated. And the fact that this does happen, as I have shown, in the midst of the most formal, planned, choreographed, and rehearsed events, suggests that intersubjective attunement leading to a continuous readjustment of one's interpretations and anticipations is probably pervasive across all kinds of events, even though we are usually not aware of it.

Conclusions

The success of an activity involving multiple participants depends on each of them being able to coordinate their moves in distinct and partly independent ways, while depending at each step on other people's actions and on the use of contextually available material resources (tools, texts, sounds, images, etc.). Ordinarily rich in semiotic content and semiotic value, such resources, as Objects of intentional acts, can exert a strong attentional pull and, as such, they can direct as well as confound social actors, even when they seem to be united by a commitment to cooperate. In this respect, analytic philosophers' emphasis on the key role of the participants' collective attitude as a mental state seems to leave little room for the semiotic resources and conditions of cooperation.[11] Collective we-intentions are, thus, expected to motivate participants to come to each other's rescue should something go wrong in the execution of a collective activity.[12] But the analysis of the two examples discussed in this chapter has shown that in some cases rescue may not come or may come too late to save the participants from embarrassment. We could of course dismiss these two cases as exceptions to the rule. Toasts are

usually completed and responded to in a timely manner and announcements are usually made based on the right information. True. But here are three reasons to care about these apparent exceptions.

The first reason is that, as we have seen, shared intentions, joint commitments, and even shared knowledge or past experience are not a sufficient condition for a joint activity to go smoothly. How many toasts has the President made? How many times has the Royal Band timed their playing of 'God Save The Queen' to someone's last word in a series of statements, be it a welcoming speech or a toast? All of this experience by the parties involved was not a sufficient condition for the successful performance of the joint activity. This supports Horkheimer and Adorno's warning about the risks of always having to give more than one receives from the senses. This is a burden for the Subject.

The second reason is that, by analysing cases that go wrong, we may be able to see the imagination at work in its attempts to get back on track. We are thus exposed to the movements of intersubjective attunement that characterize everyday interaction, when we enter in and out of alignment with people and things, sometimes retreating into our own thoughts or focusing on our own moves in order to solve a problem or to remember something that we could not retrace. Warren Beatty's accounts of what happened at the Academy Awards ceremony give us a rare post hoc glimpse of the inner processes of problem-solving for someone faced with a situation that does not fit with the task at hand. In that moment, Beatty is both involved in a joint activity and all alone with his own perceptions, interpretations, and preoccupations. He is imagining someone else having done something wrong in the immediate past and anticipating the possible consequences of his own choice.

None of these thoughts and possibilities are in the 'goal' or 'sub-goals' of the activity as previously imagined. A new twist of the imagination is needed. Beatty must make sense of the 'wrong card' on the spot and he seems to do so, in his recounting, by fitting it inside of a story, while being aware of his own accountability for the way the story will end. But there is more. While holding the envelope and the wrong card in his hands, he is also being 'Warren Beatty the actor', who knows how to entertain an audience. He seems to indulge in the laughter that he is generating, while still undecided about the best course of action he should follow. Faye Dunaway's treating him as the old scoundrel, who cannot but be 'impossible' may have given him what he needed to pass the hot potato of the wrong card to her. Once she quickly reads the title of the movie that is printed on the card and members of the audience get up and applaud, Beatty is shown smiling with apparent satisfaction. The ordeal seemed over. Yet it was not, as we know from what happened a few minutes later. By the time the mistake has been uncovered, the 'card' has acquired almost mythic proportions. From being an artefact to be held, seen, and read, the card comes to occupy a major

role on the stage. From artefact, it turns into something of an oracle whose cryptic message is finally decoded.

The third and final reason to care about these examples is that they present us with a performative paradox: the type of planned joint activity that should maximally support successful cooperation appears vulnerable to glitches. The ever-present improvisational side of the habitus turns out to be too 'regulated' to allow for the needed adjustments. At Buckingham Palace, the Royal Band does not stop to let President Obama finish his toast and the Queen does not raise her glass during the performance of the national anthem. At the Academy Awards, the presenter of an award does not stop to say: 'I was given the wrong card.' In both cases, the spirit of cooperation among the participants must confront the weight of tradition, which has its own rules and expectations (e.g., 'Don't move or speak while the national anthem is being performed' or 'The show must go on even when you have been given the wrong card').

I suggest that these powerful constraints on correcting oneself or others might be attributable to the fact that both events display qualities of *public* 'formal events' (Irvine 1979) and can be said to be in the domain of *verbal performance*, which comes with 'the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence' (Bauman 1975: 293). The more self-control such displays of competence require, the less flexibility there is for the twists and turns that allow human cooperation to succeed and glitches to be quickly and swiftly repaired.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 For a review of these studies, see Hayashi et al (2013).
2 See, for example, Schegloff et al. (1977), C. Goodwin (1981, 2017), M.H. Goodwin (1990), and Sacks (1992a, 1992b).
3 For the modern formulation of this definition of intentions, see Brentano (1973 [1874]) and Husserl (1970 [1900–01]).
4 For an application of this concept to spontaneous interactions, see Duranti (2015: Chapter 10).

5 Jastrow, in turn, had borrowed the image from an 1892 issue of the satirical weekly magazine *Fliegende Blätter*.

6 This was what Jastrow (1901: 294) had claimed when he wrote:

> … seeing is not wholly an objective matter depending upon what there is to be seen, but is very considerably a subjective matter, depending upon the eye that sees. To the same observer a given arrangement of lines now appears as the representation of one object and now of another; and from the same objective experience, especially in instances that demand a somewhat complicated exercise of the senses, different observers derive very different impressions.

7 For earlier accounts of the same episode, see Duranti (2012) and Throop and Duranti (2015).

8 For a review of some of the comments made by a number of media outlets, see Throop and Duranti (2015: 1067–8, 1074–5).

9 According to Tuomela and Miller (1988), an idealized schema of a group activity must satisfy a number of conditions, including the following three: (a) We will collectively do X; (b) As a member of the collective, I will do my part (X1); (c) Unless I do X1, we (the collective) cannot do X.

10 On the notion of 'phenomenon' in philosophy, see Dastur (2014); for a quick review of Husserl's uses of the term, see Kienzler (1991); for an interpretation starting from etymology of the Greek term 'phainómenon' (φαινόμενον) as '*that which shows itself in itself*', see Heidegger (1962: 51, emphasis in the original).

11 But see Gilbert (2007: 45) on the role of communication and Bratman (2014: 81) for the need to adjust to the external world.

12

> Suppose things go wrong when the collective starts doing X. For instance, one of the agents whom action X requires may fail to do his component action. Then, ideally at least, the others will help, exert pressure, and do whatever they think is necessary for the collective to succeed in accomplishing.
>
> (Tuomela and Miller 1988: 371; see also Tuomela 2000: 80)

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